

Counselors Corner: March 2021 - Starting Therapy

So, you're ready to talk with someone regarding your mental health... Excellent! Way to go. You've made a brave decision. Now what? I understand getting started can feel overwhelming. So, here are some next steps and considerations to help guide you through the process.

What types of therapy are available? Most often therapists work in a community agency or a private practice. Some benefits of going with a community agency include: Free or low cost options for qualifying clients, broader service offerings - often including counseling, psychological assessments, substance use counseling, and medication management. Some benefits of selecting a clinician in private practice can be working with a therapist with a focused specialty and a warm venue that can feel more intimate and comfortable.

How do I look for a therapist? I suggest asking for referrals. Some people in your life you might consider asking for a recommendation from: friends, family, doctor, school counselor, religious leader, insurance company, or your HR department. Many employers offer some free counseling services as a part of their benefits package. And if you'd rather go it alone while searching for the best fit, you can utilize some helpful search engines like [Psychology Today](#) or [Good Therapy](#). You can filter your search by entering the specific criteria you're looking for in a therapist like location, specialties, gender, insurance, language spoken, and pricing. Take time and read the bios of the therapists to determine if they sound like a good fit for you.

Which therapist should I work with? In a community agency you don't have as much say in the selection process. You're assigned a therapist within the organization based on your initial screening/intake. However, if you're going with someone in private practice you'll want to reach out and have a conversation with them to make sure they're the best fit for your situation. It may be a good idea to interview a few therapists. Many private practice therapists offer a free phone consultation. These can range from 10 – 30 minutes. During this call you'll get a good feel if the therapeutic relationship will work or not. During this call you'll want to come with a list of your questions, and be prepared to give a brief summary of the reason you're interested in therapy. This is also a good time to obtain a clear understanding about insurance, fees, and scheduling availability. [Some questions to ask a therapist during your free consultation](#)

Where will therapy happen? During this time we're still in a pandemic. Therapy services have adjusted to accommodate. You can find some therapists who are still willing to meet in person in their office using health and safety precautions like extra cleaning and wearing masks. However, many clinicians have made the transition to online. This looks similar to a zoom meeting and is quite effective. Added bonus – no drive, you can participate in therapy from the comfort of your home.

What can I expect with therapy? Meeting with your therapist is judgement free. You're in a safe space. You can trust that your therapist will keep your information confidential. The work you're doing in therapy can be healing. However, you should know up front that it can be really hard. It requires the client to let down their walls, be vulnerable, and to trust the process. Typically a client meets once a week for about an hour. However, the client is encouraged to continue the work outside of sessions. A therapist may even assign homework for the client to complete on their own. It is also important to note that therapy doesn't necessarily follow a neat linear pathway to healing. Some sessions are going

to feel great, others will be rough, and sometimes you might even feel like you've taken a step backwards. This is the way it goes. Hang in there – this is a marathon, not a sprint.

Remember – You're in charge. You will determine if the therapist is a good fit for you or not. If not – look for another one. The relationship between client and therapist is critical. Many people believe that this is the single most important ingredient in successful therapy. Also, because you're in charge – you get to decide how much work you put into your healing process. The more you invest, the more you'll get out of it. Get ready to roll up your sleeves and get to work. You're worth it!

Good luck with your search for a therapist! If you have any trouble finding one, please feel free to reach out, and I would be happy to help connect you with a clinician.

Local Community Agency Therapy Services:

- [Kent Youth & Family Services](#) (Kent) Phone: (253) 859-0300
- [Rainier Foothills Wellness Foundation](#) (Enumclaw) Phone: (360) 802-3206
- [Renton Area Youth & Family Services](#) (Renton) Phone: (425) 271-5600
- [Social Impact Center \(Formerly Nexus Youth and Family\)](#) (Maple Valley) Phone: (425) 358-9451
- [Sound Mental Health](#) (Auburn, Kent, Renton) Phone: 1-800-828-1449
- [Thrive Wellness Clinic](#) (Maple Valley) Phone: (425) 584-7570
- [Valley Cities - Behavioral Health Care](#) (Auburn, Kent, Renton) Phone: (253) 833-7444
- [YES - Youth Eastside Services](#) (Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond) Phone: (425) 747-4937

Additional Wellness Resources:

[City of Maple Valley – Local Resources](#)

[Tahoma School District Wellness Resources](#)